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Religious encounters on the southern Egyptian frontier in Late Antiquity (AD 298-642)

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10. The Reuse of Temples at Elephantine and Syene

A rather different situation from that of Philae existed in the two other 'towns' in the First Cataract area: Syene and Elephantine. Here there was not such a restricted area for habitation and many temples for which new purposes had to be found. We will now conduct a survey of the reuse of the temples in these places, which is greatly facilitated by recent excavations. Since no systematic survey of the material remains of Christian Elephantine and Syene as yet exists, it is necessary to describe some of the material in detail. Thus an idea can be given of the different ways their temples were reused.

The Reuse of Temples at Elephantine

On Elephantine Island, as we have already seen at the start of Part I, an entirely different fate awaited the great temple of Khnum from that of the temple of Isis at Philae (Fig. 7). Having lost its former pride, the temple had already fallen out of use by the fourth century. In the third or fourth century, fires were lit in the pronaos and the small northwest porch of the temple, the same phenomenon being noticed near a porch at the temple of Satet. These fires may be connected to the destructions of the temple terrace dating to the end of the third century.⁴⁰⁹ From this time onwards, the stones of the temple could have been reused for building purposes; this certainly happened after the second quarter of the fifth century.⁴¹⁰

The method of dismantling was not one of taking out the stones from top to bottom, but rather horizontally, and dependent on which part was free to be removed in the context of other building activities on the terrace.⁴¹¹ At an unknown time, a Ptolemaic porch used for processions in the temple's forecourt was razed to the ground, followed in the second quarter of the fifth century by a large building project covering the entire forecourt, in which a series of regularly built houses were erected. These have been interpreted as a military garrison,⁴¹² but, recently, doubts have been raised about the military settlement, and the house blocks have been reinterpreted as a neighbourhood for the poor.⁴¹³ The settlement probably existed for about a century, as after this time large parts of the former temple were pulled down, such as the pylon, the side porticoes and the pronaos.⁴¹⁴

The demolishment is an indication that most of the temple was still standing in the sixth century. In the second half of that century, a church was built in the dismantled pronaos of the temple. This quadratic church of the type we encountered earlier at Philae ('Umgangsvierstützenbau'), and which can also be found in several places in Nubia, reused the former pronaos.⁴¹⁵ The foundations of two of its four piers had to be reworked, because the pavement of the pronaos had already been removed. The church probably consisted of a *baptisterium* in a northern room and a vaulted roof.⁴¹⁶ In any case the church remained in use into the ninth century, after which the situation is unclear.⁴¹⁷

⁴⁰⁹ Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 15-6; H. Jaritz, *Elephantine III. Die Terrassen vor den Tempeln des Chnum und der Satet* (Mainz, 1980) 50-1.

⁴¹⁰ Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 31; G. Haeny in Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 198.

⁴¹¹ Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 30-1.

⁴¹² Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 16-29. Cf. R.D. Gempeler, *Elephantine X. Die Keramik römischer bis früh-arabischer Zeit* (Mainz, 1992) 50.

⁴¹³ Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 20-1, 39-40. Cf., however, Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 357 (n. 717).

⁴¹⁴ Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 31-3.

⁴¹⁵ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 38, with more parallels.

⁴¹⁶ Grossmann in Kaiser *et al.*, '1. Grabungsbericht', 101-7; G. Grimm in W. Kaiser *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. Fünfter Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 31 (1975) 39-84 at 79; Grossmann,

A badly preserved building (T 43) with a currently unknown function was found directly to the north of the church in the Khnum temple. In the middle of one of the rooms of this plastered structure, stone plates were aligned in a demicircle. Next to it was found a thick substance that may have had something to do with ritual purposes. On account of these features the building has been interpreted as a 'chapel' and dated to the fifth or sixth century. It could well have had a connection of some sort with the church just across the street, but unfortunately the scanty remains cannot provide us with a more complete picture.⁴¹⁸ The excavators also assumed a connection with the house T 11, to the northeast of the church, but for the precise relationship we are, again, left in the dark.⁴¹⁹

It seems that the dismantling of the Khnum temple had but one aim: to reuse its precious stones as building material. This process was slow, and was to a large degree determined by other building activities in the area, like the building of house blocks on the forecourt and a church in the pronaos. Blocks from the temple have also been discovered in the foundations of Late Antique houses nearby;⁴²⁰ other blocks were transported across the river to strengthen the town wall of Syene.⁴²¹

Another temple on Elephantine, known as 'Temple X', also served building purposes in Syene for many of its blocks have been found there. The temple was built by Ptolemy IV and was completely razed to the ground in Late Antiquity, which is why its original location on Elephantine is unknown.⁴²² The inspector of the Egyptian Antiquities Service at Aswan, who excavated 'around the temple of Isis at Aswan' in 1961-1963, collected these blocks but left not a single note.⁴²³ Apparently, he dumped the ones he found in the nearby temple of Isis, after which they were examined in the 1970s and published.⁴²⁴

In the autumn of 1907, the remains of a building, interpreted as a temple of the same Ptolemy IV which had been renovated by the Roman Emperors Tiberius, Claudius and Trajan, were discovered north of the English church in Aswan (the site of the present Coptic church, see Fig. 8).⁴²⁵ Earlier, in 1895, a paved road had been

Elephantine II, 22, 75-111; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 138. Cf. Gempeler, *Elephantine X*, 47, who dates the church to the third quarter of the sixth century or slightly later.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 29-38, who distinguishes three 'Bebauungsphasen' (I: second half fifth-second half sixth century; II: second half sixth century-seventh century; III: seventh century), with the alternative chronology proposed by Gempeler, *Elephantine X*, 45-51, who extends the habitation of the forecourt into the ninth century. See, most recently, Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 47, 77, 102-3, who distinguishes three 'Bauschichten' (I: second half fifth-sixth century; II: seventh century; III: ninth century).

⁴¹⁸ G. Haeny in W. Kaiser *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. Zweiter Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 27 (1971) 181-201 at 191, in W. Kaiser *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. Dritter Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 28 (1972) 157-200 at 174-6, and in Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 198-200.

⁴¹⁹ Grossmann in Kaiser *et al.*, '2. Grabungsbericht', 186; Grimm in Kaiser *et al.*, '5. Grabungsbericht', 79.

⁴²⁰ E.g. in house M 10, which was built against the temple's rear wall. See Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 47.

⁴²¹ H. Jaritz, 'On Three Townsites in the Upper Thebaid', *CRIPEL* 8 (1986) 37-42 at 40; Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 20. Cf. E. Bresciani and S. Pernigotti, *Assuan* (Pisa, 1978) 308-9.

⁴²² E. Laskowska-Kusztal, *Elephantine XV. Die Dekorfragmente der ptolemäisch-römischen Tempel von Elephantine* (Mainz, 1996) 15-21; Kaiser, *Elephantine*, 54.

⁴²³ J. Leclant, 'Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan, 1960-1961', *Or.* 31 (1962) 197-222 at 203 and 'Fouilles et travaux, 1962-1963', *Or.* 33 (1964) 337-404 at 349 (n. 1); Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 9, 14-5, 309-10. Cf. W. Kornfeld, 'Aramäische Sarkophagen in Assuan', *WZKM* 61 (1967) 9-16, who published three Aramaic sandstone sarcophagi found by the inspector about 200 m from the temple of Isis.

⁴²⁴ Cf. the discussion of the material by Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 305-11.

⁴²⁵ 'Recent Discoveries in Egypt', *PSBA* 30 (1908) 72-4 at 73-4. Without doubt, this is the same site as the one mentioned by J. de Morgan *et al.*, *Catalogue des monuments et inscriptions de l'Égypte antique*, 3 vols (Vienna, 1894-1909) 1.57: 'Un peu au sud de ce temple en existait un second dont les débris sont enfouis sous plusieurs mètres de sable mêlé de briques sèches; quelques pierres en avaient été tirées autrefois pour être employées à la construction de murs; d'après les traces d'inscriptions qu'elles

found immediately west of the site with statue bases dedicated to Germanicus, Trajan, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. To the east of the road, a limestone block had been found which was interpreted as part of a gate.⁴²⁶ In 1904, another statue base was found dedicated to the Emperor Diadumenianus (217/218).⁴²⁷ Apparently the building stood at the end of the paved road. Inside the building, the excavators found a granite column 'having a cross within a circle sculptured in relief on it'. Other columns contained 'carved 'Byzantine' designs'. The objects found were a statue base, whose inscription had been erased and replaced by a cross carved within a circle, another statue base and an altar dedicated to Jupiter whose inscriptions had also been erased. On account of these features, the excavators thought that the 'temple of Ptolemy IV' had been reused as a church in Christian times.⁴²⁸

Although the objects found have since vanished, the exact location is unclear and the excavators left no precise documentation, this interpretation is probably false.⁴²⁹ In a letter of 15 January 1909, a French Egyptologist published the inscription on a rose granite altar found in the area of 'the remains of a Coptic church with granite columns' and 'several bases with Latin inscriptions'. The badly preserved inscription is dedicated to Jupiter Heliopolitanus, and the dedicant is apparently from Berytus (modern Beirut).⁴³⁰ Evidently, this description refers to the same site as the one excavated in 1895 and 1907, and suggests rather that the building was a church and not a temple reused as a church. As it cannot be a coincidence that the decorated fragments found in Aswan and belonging to the sacral complex that Ptolemy IV built on Elephantine ('Baukomplex X') date to the same reign as the building excavated at the beginning of the twentieth century, it seems likely that the building consisted of these blocks. In that case, the inspector probably took the blocks from the site of the 'temple of Ptolemy IV' and deposited them in the temple of Isis. If so, the alleged converted temple is not a temple at all, as has been maintained, but a church constructed of reused blocks from 'Temple X'.⁴³¹ These blocks were of a relatively small size, which could have been the reason why they were transported across the river.⁴³²

A considerable number of blocks from another dismantled temple, the so-called 'Temple Y', were also recovered. The remains of this Roman temple consist of two complexes of blocks, one transported at the beginning of the twentieth century to Cairo, the other found reused in a Late Antique quay wall. The quay wall was found near a monumental stairway built in Roman times in the harbour in the northeastern part of the antique town of Elephantine.⁴³³ 'Temple Y' would presumably have stood

portent, on peut établir que ce temple était lui aussi ptolémaïque et peut-être même de l'époque de Ptolémée IV Philopator comme le précédent'.

⁴²⁶ A.H. Sayce, 'Roman Inscriptions at Assuân', *PSBA* 18 (1896) 107-9.

⁴²⁷ 'Recent Discoveries', 74.

⁴²⁸ 'Recent Discoveries', 73.

⁴²⁹ As already hinted at by Laskowska-Kusztal, *Elephantine XV*, 21 (n. 181): 'Die Geschlossenheit des Dekorationskomplexes V und seine Beziehung zu einem Bauwerk auf Elephantine sind so gut begründet, da die Zugehörigkeit der in Assuan belegten Stücke zu dem nördlich der anglikanischen Kirche befindlichen Bauwerk ausgeschlossen ist (...). Die Beziehungen wären möglich nur bei der Annahme, da die fraglichen Fragmente in diesem Bauwerk wiederverwendet wurden'. See also J. Leclant, 'Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan, 1981-1982', *Or* 52 (1983) 461-542 at 511; E. Lanciers, 'Die ägyptischen Tempelbauten zur Zeit des Ptolemaios V. Epiphanes (204-180 v.Chr.)', *MDAIK* 43 (1987) 173-82 at 176.

⁴³⁰ S. de Ricci, 'Lettres d'Égypte', *Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres. Comptes rendus des séances* (1909) 144-65 at 147-8 (quote on p. 147): 'On a notamment découvert, avec les ruines d'une église copte à colonnes de granit, plusieurs bases à inscriptions latines (...). Les derniers travaux ont amené la découverte d'un lourd autel de granit rose portant sur sa face antérieure une inscription fort mal conservée'.

⁴³¹ Cf. Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 14; Jaritz, 'Three Townsites', 40.

⁴³² Laskowska-Kusztal, *Elephantine XV*, 21.

⁴³³ E. Laskowska-Kusztal in G. Dreyer *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 31. und 32. Grabungsbericht', forthcoming. Cf. Laskowska-Kusztal, *Elephantine XV*, 21-5.

not far away.⁴³⁴ During a first exploration of the site in 1985, the wall was interpreted as belonging to a church on the grounds that crosses and 'a Coptic inscription' had been incised on the wall. Moreover, its orientation was similar to that of the church in the pronaos of the Khnum temple and sandstone columns with crosses had been found on the platform above the wall. Thus, the quay wall was interpreted as, 'a nowadays uncovered segment of the foundation of the northern wall of a church that used to be quite large'.⁴³⁵ Recently, during excavations from 2000 until 2002, this wall could be further explored and was fully excavated.⁴³⁶

The excavations revealed constructions from the Roman until the Arab period, which are now situated about 50 m from the Nile but would once have stood on the Nile. In Late Antiquity, the quay wall was renovated several times ('Bauschichten' E-B). The last of these levels, which is dated on the basis of the pottery to the middle of the sixth century, consisted almost exclusively of blocks from 'Temple Y' (walls M 1273 and 1274; Fig. 9). In the seventh century, a 'latrine' was built in front of the wall, partly covering the side that faced the Nile, and several other renovation works were carried out in the area.⁴³⁷ On the blocks, the excavations have revealed about twenty-two crosses, five representations of boats and four Greek inscriptions, which have recently been published (see Appendix 5, nos. 5-8, for text and translation).⁴³⁸ Because the wall was dated to the middle of the sixth century and the area was renovated in the seventh century, they seem to date to around the second half of the sixth century.

The first inscription (no. 5), of which some letters have been lost to the left, contains the name of a Dios, son of Pasmēt, the same regional name constructed with the Egyptian word *mdw*, the staff of Khnum, as that of some of the last priests of Philae.⁴³⁹ His son Dios was an *actuarius*, an official involved in the distribution of the *annona* in the Late Antique army, who probably belonged to the regiment of Elephantine.⁴⁴⁰ The second inscription (no. 6) only contains an indiction year and a cross without a context, but is an indication of the way the blocks from 'Temple Y' were reused in the quay wall. The inscription was incised on a block with an Ancient Egyptian relief and clearly turned round. While leaving most of the relief intact, part of it was effaced and incised with the inscription. The third inscription (no. 7) reads 'one (?) God is the helper', which is a variant of the formula 'there is one God who helps' (εἷς Θεὸς ὁ βοηθῶν). This Christian formula was common throughout the Mediterranean and is also used in one of the building inscriptions from Philae.⁴⁴¹

A fourth inscription (no. 8), which was incised underneath no. 7, commemorates the inundation of the Nile on 17/18 September (Fig. 10). Several Nile level inscriptions which commemorate an extremely high Nile level and date to pre-Christian times have been preserved, and the inscription starts with the familiar formula 'the Nile rose to...'. However, in this case the inundation level is marked by 'the feet (?) of that footbench of the cross', probably referring to the partly preserved

⁴³⁴ Kaiser, *Elephantine*, 53-4.

⁴³⁵ H. Jaritz in W. Kaiser *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 13./14. Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 43 (1987) 75-114 at 107.

⁴³⁶ After the excavations, the blocks were taken out, and are planned to be part of a reconstruction of 'Temple Y' in the archaeological park on the island. This reconstruction is being supervised by C. Ubertini. I would like to thank him and S. Schönenberger for discussing the material with me.

⁴³⁷ S. Schönenberger in G. Dreyer *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 28./29./30. Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 58 (2002) 157-225 at 200-9.

⁴³⁸ Crosses: Y 21, 31, 37 (three times), 39, 44, 51, 65-6 (three times), 80, 86, 119, 125, 211 (twice), 212, 213, 602, 605. Boats: YE 16 (two boats), Y 21, 48, 836. Inscriptions: Y 39, 51 (twice), 212. For the inscriptions, see Dijkstra, 'Late Antique Inscriptions', 59-66 (Figs. 3-5).

⁴³⁹ This is the only attestation of the name Pasmēt in inscriptions. For Pasmēt in the papyri, see *SB* XIV 12167 B 65; *P.Edmondstone* 3, 20; *P.Lond.* V 1734.26; *P.Münch.* I 2.17; *O.Wilck.* 287.3 (Πα...cμηῑ).

⁴⁴⁰ Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 1, 152-6.

⁴⁴¹ *I.Philae* II 227.1. See E. Peterson, *Εἷς Θεός. Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Göttingen, 1926); Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 1, 120-1.

cross underneath the inscription. It is well known that the recording of Nile levels continued into Late Antiquity, as appears, for example, from the Nilometers at Elephantine and Philae that were still in use in this period.⁴⁴² Yet, the unique formulation of this inscription demonstrates that the Nile cult had attained a Christian shape in Late Antiquity.⁴⁴³

The excavations have also revealed that there is no connection with other walls on the platform. Therefore its alleged function as the north wall of a church can be discarded. Nevertheless, a granite base found during the recent campaign confirmed the proximity of a Christian building. It may well have been the rectangular structure found on the platform (M 1276), of which only three layers of blocks have been preserved but which showed similarities to the church in the pronaos of the Khnum temple and other Late Antique buildings on Elephantine.⁴⁴⁴ Moreover, this building stood on the same level as the horizontal space constructed above walls 1273 and 1274.⁴⁴⁵ It seems, then, that this building can tentatively be identified with a church that was built on the platform after the quay wall was renovated in the middle of the sixth century. This would be a remarkable continuity with practices from time immemorial. Terraces with the Ancient Egyptian temples of Khnum and Satet on top are known from the same island, with the walls incised with graffiti.⁴⁴⁶ Our evidence suggests that this practice continued into the Christian period, and that pilgrims on boats disembarked on the island to ascend to their place of worship in the same way as many centuries before.

Having identified at least two churches on the island, probably both dating to the second half of the sixth century, we cannot pass over parts of at least a third one having found scattered around the island.⁴⁴⁷ Column bases, shafts and other building material of red Aswan granite have been reconstructed into the so-called 'Christian basilica' which is nowadays the first in a row of reconstructed buildings in the archaeological park on Elephantine. The reconstruction consists of finds from different parts of the island. They probably once belonged to a large church that no doubt was located in the northern area of the town on the highest layers of the ruin hill and that was dated, again, to the second half of the sixth century. The rest of the material probably not only belonged to this church but also to other Christian buildings on Elephantine which have now been lost.⁴⁴⁸

The Reuse of Temples at Syene

Whereas Elephantine has been thoroughly excavated since the 1960s, much of ancient Syene still needs to be discovered. The site is almost entirely covered by the modern town of Aswan and excavations have been carried out only incidentally (Fig. 8). Most

⁴⁴² Crosses have been found on both Nilometers, see for Philae Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, 34, and for Elephantine *Description de l'Égypte* 1, Pl. 33.

⁴⁴³ Dijkstra, 'Late Antique Inscriptions', 65-6, with references.

⁴⁴⁴ Schönenberger in Dreyer *et al.*, '28./29./30. Grabungsbericht', 206.

⁴⁴⁵ Schönenberger in Dreyer *et al.*, '28./29./30. Grabungsbericht', 207.

⁴⁴⁶ Jaritz, *Elephantine III*, F. Junge, *Elephantine XI. Funde und Bauteile 1.-7. Kampagne, 1969-1976* (Mainz, 1987) 40-3.

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. MacCoull, 'Christianity', 153 (though speaking of two more churches), Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 138, who only knows of the church in the pronaos of Khnum temple, and Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 41, who mentions three churches: the 'basilica', the church in the pronaos of Khnum temple and the 'chapel' in house T 43, although the function of the latter building is far from certain.

⁴⁴⁸ Parts of the 'basilica' had already been noticed during earlier German excavations: W. Honroth, O. Rubensohn, F. Zucker, 'Bericht über die Ausgrabungen auf Elephantine in den Jahren 1906-1908', *ZÄS* 46 (1909) 14-61 at 47. See further: Grossmann in Kaiser *et al.*, '2. Grabungsbericht', 189, and '3. Grabungsbericht', 182-3; W. Kaiser in Kaiser *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. Vierter Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 30 (1974) 65-90 at 71, and *Elephantine*, 47; Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 26-8. Note that in the second report the church is dated on the basis of the capitals to the first half of the sixth century, whereas in the third report it is dated to the second half of that century.

of the work done so far has concentrated on the temple of Isis, a wonderfully preserved, almost unknown temple in the middle of modern Aswan. The temple was discovered in 1871 by engineers who were working on a railway, and published by the Egyptologist Auguste Mariette (1821-1881) shortly afterwards.⁴⁴⁹ He made a ground plan, side and frontal view of the temple, and published some of the reliefs. In 1894, another Egyptologist, Jacques de Morgan (1857-1924), together with his team, copied the plans by Mariette, but in addition indicated on two cross-sections the amount of rubble that had been taken away.⁴⁵⁰ On these cross-sections, it can be seen that a slope of rubble came down from the walls to the middle. Apparently, the interior of the temple had been filled up, and the first excavators made the holes that are still visible today at the top of the façade, both left and right, to enter the temple. De Morgan also edited the reliefs visible to him. He had removed the rubble in front of the façade down to the bottom, but the lower registers had already been covered again by the time of publication.⁴⁵¹

For a long time the temple languished, as can be seen by reading through Baedeker and other travel books. For example, in the French Baedeker edition of 1898, mention is made of the temple 'which is hardly worth being seen'.⁴⁵² The outside was still covered with rubble (except for the façade), just as the two side chapels on the inside. In the English edition of 1908, the side chapels seem to have been cleared for the first time. Some additional information is given on the hall in front of the naos, 'in which stand the bases of several statues and sacred boats'.⁴⁵³ This situation was still unchanged in 1928 and 1929,⁴⁵⁴ but the *Guide Bleu* of 1950 only mentions bark stands.⁴⁵⁵ As mentioned above, the inspector of Aswan used the Isis temple as a storage room for blocks found in the neighbourhood during excavations in 1961-1963.

All this material, together with the reliefs and a ground plan of the Isis temple, were published by an Italian team in 1978. Partly with the help of a bulldozer they laid bare the entire temple, which had become encroached upon by modern houses from all sides. The publication was prepared during two campaigns, after which the readings of the reliefs were checked several times in subsequent years.⁴⁵⁶ The temple was dedicated to Isis 'at the head of the army', no doubt connected to Syene's function as a garrison in the Graeco-Roman period.⁴⁵⁷ The decoration has remained unfinished, for only in the most important places, at the main entrances (B, C and E) and on the east wall of the naos (F), can reliefs be found (Fig. 11). They contain the cartouches of Ptolemy III and his successor Ptolemy IV. Originally, the temple was surrounded by a temenos wall which has been partly recovered. The interior consists of a hall with two square pillars (P I and P II) and a naos (F) with two side chapels (H and J). It is possible that the temple extended towards the west with walls of mudbrick, but this part has remained as yet unexcavated.

⁴⁴⁹ A. Mariette, G. Maspero, *Monuments divers recueillis en Égypte et en Nubie*, 2 vols (Paris, 1872-89) 2.6 (Pls. 22-6). Cf. A. Mariette, *Itinéraire de la Haute-Égypte* (Alexandria, 1872) 249.

⁴⁵⁰ De Morgan *et al.*, *Catalogue* 1, 47-57.

⁴⁵¹ De Morgan *et al.*, *Catalogue* 1, 51.

⁴⁵² K. Baedeker, *Égypte. Manuel du voyageur* (Leipzig, 1898) 331-2. Cf. the German edition of 1902⁵ (p. 330), the French edition of 1903² (p. 329) and the German edition of 1906⁶ (p. 335).

⁴⁵³ K. Baedeker, *Egypt and the Sudan. Handbook for Travellers* (Leipzig, 1908⁶) 350.

⁴⁵⁴ K. Baedeker, *Ägypten und der Sūdān. Handbuch für Reisende* (Leipzig, 1928⁸) 370, and *Egypt and the Sudan. Handbook for Travellers* (Leipzig, 1929⁸) 381.

⁴⁵⁵ M. Band, *Guide Bleu. Égypte* (Paris, 1950) 595-6.

⁴⁵⁶ Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 16. Cf. J. Leclant, 'Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan, 1969-1970', *Or.* 40 (1971) 224-66 at 244 (Figs. 41-2); 'Fouilles et travaux, 1970-1971', *Or.* 41 (1972) 249-91 at 268; 'Fouilles et travaux, 1971-1972', *Or.* 42 (1973) 393-440 at 420-1; 'Fouilles et travaux, 1975-1976', *Or.* 46 (1977) 233-99 at 266; 'Fouilles et travaux, 1977-1978', *Or.* 48 (1979) 340-412 at 384. A preliminary report on the blocks was published by S. Pernigotti, 'Notizia preliminare su alcuni blocchi di Assuan', *SCO* 21 (1972) 314-20.

⁴⁵⁷ Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 21-6.

The excavators also found traces of the reuse of the temple as a church. First of all, they observed that several of the reliefs had been hacked away. Moreover, in the pillared hall they found Christian figurative graffiti representing boats and a rosette, crosses and Coptic inscriptions; the wall niches, the hacked away reliefs and certain adaptations in the pavement were also ascribed to the period of reuse as a church. Last but not least, the excavators found two Christian wall paintings which were in a bad state of preservation but were photographed with an infrared camera. The frescoes were found about 1 m above the ground and had a height of about 0.95 m. They were positioned opposite each other on the south wall of the northern pillar (P I) and on the north wall of the southern pillar (P II). On P I, a female figure seated on a throne and three persons standing on either side of her were depicted in blue, red and black paint. On the southern pillar three bearded figures and an angel were depicted.⁴⁵⁸ Both paintings were enclosed by red frames. Because of the painting showing a seated Mary, the church was thought to have been dedicated to Mary, thus demonstrating another case of adoption of a former cult of Isis. The excavators concluded that the church was located in the pillared hall D and assumed that the door to the naos E must either have contained an apse or other structure closing off this room, for the reliefs in the naos remained untouched. The converted temple would then have formed a three aisled church and the two side chapels could have been used by the clergy.⁴⁵⁹

Recently, Grossmann has challenged this view and suggested that the temple of Isis at Aswan was the only example of a converted temple using the naos in Egypt.⁴⁶⁰ In 2000, excavations of the mudbrick houses dating to the Late Antique and Arab periods around the temple of Isis were reopened.⁴⁶¹ Because the Italian team concentrated on the publication of the Ancient Egyptian reliefs and blocks, they had paid less attention to the graffiti and the reuse of the temple after the Graeco-Roman period. These were now fully explored during three campaigns from 2001 until 2003.⁴⁶² Here we will concentrate on how the temple was reused as a church; without passing over the graffiti that are informative about the reuse however.

In 1978, several of these inscriptions were published. Two Greek and three demotic inscriptions were found on the wall of the façade outside, but most were demotic and hieroglyphic inscriptions from the pillared hall possibly ranging in date from the reign of Ptolemy V (187 BC) to that of Commodus (184 AD).⁴⁶³ Just as at Philae, the form of these inscriptions is that of pilgrimage inscriptions, namely *rn-f mne ty*, 'may his name remain here', or they simply contain the names of the dedicants. In addition to the publication of these texts, traces of many more inscriptions were seen but on account of their poor preservation not deemed worthy of publication.⁴⁶⁴ In addition to these Graeco-Roman inscriptions, eight names written crudely in Coptic on the inside of the main entrance were also published, most of

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. the dubious identification of the figures by MacCoull, 'Christianity', 154, with Shenoute, Antony and Pachomius, the angel reading the latter's Rule.

⁴⁵⁹ Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 38-41 (with Pls. XXVII and XXVIII).

⁴⁶⁰ Grossmann, 'Tempel', 194.

⁴⁶¹ L. Giddy, 'Digging Diary 2000', *Egyptian Archaeology* 18 (2001) 28-32 at 32, and 'Digging Diary 2000-1', *Egyptian Archaeology* 19 (2001) 28-32 at 30; N. Grimal, E. Adly, 'Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan, 2000-2002', *Or* 72 (2003) 1-127 at 92, and 'Fouilles et travaux, 2002-2003', *Or* 73 (2004) 1-149 at 109-10. For earlier work around the temple of Isis, see H. Jaritz, M. Rodziewicz, 'Syene – Review of the Urban Remains and Its Pottery', *MDAIK* 50 (1994) 115-41, and 'Syene – Investigation of the Urban Remains in the Vicinity of the Temple of Isis (II)', *MDAIK* 52 (1996) 233-49.

⁴⁶² An archaeological report on the reuse of the temple and a catalogue of the graffiti from the temple of Isis are in preparation by the author, see Grimal and Adly, 'Fouilles et travaux, 2002-2003', 109.

⁴⁶³ P.W. Pestman, 'Haronnophris and Chaonnophris. Two Indigenous Pharaohs in Ptolemaic Egypt (205-186 B.C.)', in S.P. Vleeming (ed.), *Hundred-Gated Thebes. Acts of a Colloquium on Thebes and the Theban Area in the Graeco-Roman Period* (Leiden, 1995) 101-37 at 136, who corrects the date of Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 141-2 (8 March 189) to 7 March 187, if the inscription indeed dates to the reign of Ptolemy V.

⁴⁶⁴ Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 121-46.

them preceeded by a cross. The names are very common and seem to have been written on the wall in pairs.⁴⁶⁵

Apart from these published inscriptions, however, the walls of the temple contain many more graffiti, especially figurative graffiti, of which only a few are mentioned in the publication of 1978, and which tell us perhaps even more about the reuse of the temple as a church. For example, the crosses near the side entrance (C) indicate that laymen probably entered the church from this side and that the main entrance was closed or only used for special occasions. The Christian graffiti in the hall show that at the time of the reuse of the church, the floor was still at the same level. Neither of the secondary sanctuaries (H and J) bears any Christian vestiges. However, the main sanctuary (F) contains large *dipinti* probably added later and painted in brown paint high upon the walls. The concentration of crosses and paintings in the pillared hall indicates that this room was most probably used as the interior of the church proper, and not the naos. This assumption is supported by the place where the main altar of the church would have stood.

Of the four altars standing in the temple today, one is *in situ*. This altar once stood in a vertical position in the naos but has now fallen down. Two more altars that stand in a west-east line on both sides of pillar P I in room D may originally have stood elsewhere in the sanctuary. As the altars mentioned thus far all three bear the cartouches of Ptolemy X, the two in D having identical inscriptions, these two altars probably once stood in the side chapels (H and J). Perhaps they were moved to D to create an 'Umgangsvierstützenbau', the quadratic form we encountered before at Philae and Elephantine, and which was common in Nubian churches. The altar, the one that is *in situ*, is unlikely to have been used as the main altar in the church, however. The naos is very deep and dark, and the distance between clergymen and laymen would have been too far: looking from D through door E one could hardly have seen the clergymen performing their duties. Moreover, there is no trace of an apse or other structure which would have been expected at the east end of a church. Finally, if the altar in the naos was used as the main altar in Christian times, the hieroglyphs on it would have been hacked away, as was common practice. There is thus no reason to assume that this altar was reused as the main altar of the church.

The fourth altar does fulfil the requirements. It does not contain any inscriptions, and is clearly not *in situ*, as a recent removal of the altar from the wall has shown. The altar is made of red Aswan granite and is 86 cm high.⁴⁶⁶ It is interesting to compare this altar to similar altars found on nearby Philae.⁴⁶⁷ Two altars of red Aswan granite have been found inside the temple of Isis. These altars correspond in size to the three altars from the reign of Ptolemy X in the Isis temple of Aswan (heights between 110 and 120 cm). By contrast, the reused altar in the pronaos at Philae is different in size, and is 90 cm high. It served as the main altar of a church, the *topos* of St Stephen. The difference with the altar of the Isis temple at Aswan is that the back of the latter altar has remained unworked, as if it was intended to be put against a wall. Moreover, it contains a feature that the other altars do not have: a small ridge forming a circle with two holes in it on top of the altar, the original function of which remains unclear.⁴⁶⁸ Nonetheless, as the altar is about the same height as the reused altar in the

⁴⁶⁵ The names are from top to bottom and from left to right: Kosmas (ΚΟΣΜΑΣ), Kosmas (ΚΟΣΜΑΣ), Senoute (ΣΗΝΟΥΤΕ), Menas (ΜΗΝΑΣ), Menas (ΜΗΝΑΣ; *ed.princ.* reads ΠΑΝΣΙΣ), Senoute (ΣΗΝΟΥΤΕ), Papnouthis (ΠΑΠΝΟΥΘΙΣ), and Papnouthis (ΠΑΠΝΟΥΘΙΣ). Cf. Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 146 (Pl. XLVII).

⁴⁶⁶ Dimensions below: 86.5 x 95 cm; above: 90 x 102 cm. Cf. the measurements by Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 34.

⁴⁶⁷ F.L. Griffith, 'Four Granite Stands at Philae', *BIFAO* 30 (1930) 127-30. A fourth altar not mentioned here is a statue base from the reign of Ptolemy VI which was found on el-Hesa.

⁴⁶⁸ The altar may have been used as a statue base, the holes (of which one has been lost) serving for attachment of the statue (personal communication from P. Grossmann). Cf. Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 34, who interpret the altar as intended for libations.

topos of St Stephen at Philae, there can hardly be any doubt that it was used as the main altar in the church inside the temple of Isis at Syene.

What did the ground plan of the church look like? An important way of deciding this, is to locate the place where the altar stood. The reconstruction is made particularly difficult by the intensive reuse of the building through the ages and the gradual filling of the interior with rubble. These factors have caused several disturbances in the original pavement, which at certain places has disappeared entirely. Three identical, quadratic holes were cut out behind the door into the naos (E), which formed a triangle. The beams stuck in these holes could have formed a construction to fence off the main sanctuary (F). The construction was perhaps supported by a large hole in the northwestern corner of the sanctuary. Traces on the walls of E show that the construction may have been several metres high and would have hidden the sanctuary from sight. This structure almost certainly did not consist of a round apse but more probably had a rectangular shape, a not uncommon feature in Egyptian churches.⁴⁶⁹ The main altar would have stood in front of the apse, that is, in front of E on approximately the same line as the altar Db. On this spot a large disturbance was found caused by fire. The unworked rear side would have been turned towards the east and in this way would not have disturbed the laymen.

The area where the main altar stood was called the **presbyterium** and was only accessible to clergymen. It was closed off by screens (**cancelli**) which were generally less than 1 m in height and would have left small rectangular marks (**stipites**) in the pavement.⁴⁷⁰ Unfortunately, this is in large part unclear due to the disturbances. However, a large post hole was found between pillars P I and P II. The screen wall could have run between the southeastern corner of P I and the northeastern corner of P II, as well as from these corners towards the east wall of D. A small post hole on the south side may have been part of the screen wall but, admittedly, there are no further traces left.

Another hole, on the south side of P II is in line with the other large posthole and could have been part of an extension of the screen to the south of the pillar. The three sanctuaries probably remained in function for clerical purposes. Confusingly, in Christian architecture the place where the Eucharist was celebrated was also designated 'sanctuary'. The room was divided into several separate rooms, such as the apse, the **presbyterium** and side-rooms which were intended as the changing rooms for clerics or as a storage room for liturgical instruments, book rolls and church administration.⁴⁷¹ As the church did not contain a seat for the bishop (**synthronon**), this church was certainly not an episcopal church.⁴⁷² Both posts of the door to the main sanctuary (E), were worked to contain frescoes and originally would have contained reliefs.

Some of the niches are certainly from the Christian period, for temples usually did not contain wall niches. These niches are of two types: one that is rectangular in shape and the other, if also rectangular, containing beams above and below to close off the niche. It seems that these niches were part of the interior of the church: four on the south wall of D, one in the case of the east and west walls, and one in the naos (F): proof of its usage in Christian times.⁴⁷³ These niches were used for utilitarian purposes, like storing the liturgical vessels and books.⁴⁷⁴ At a later time, all the niches were widened and some other, simpler niches were added for domestic purposes. Use of the former church as housing or perhaps stables also appears from holes in the walls

⁴⁶⁹ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 116-8.

⁴⁷⁰ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 122-5.

⁴⁷¹ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 113-6.

⁴⁷² Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 118, 189-91.

⁴⁷³ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 109-10, 184-6.

⁴⁷⁴ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 186.

intended for ropes to tether animals. Other holes could have served to divide the space into smaller units.

Although an exact ground plan of the church in the temple of Isis at Aswan cannot be established due to the disturbances in the pavement, a reconstruction of the reuse of the temple does reveal that it was first turned into a modest church. This church only occupied a small part of the former temple, namely the hall in front of the naos. This is a common feature of transformations of temples into churches in Egypt and Nubia, and has a nice parallel in the nearby temple of Isis at Philae. Unlike the main temple at Philae, a reorientation of the axis was not necessary as the main axis of the temple was already oriented eastwards. The small space with wall paintings on both pillars and on both sides of the entrance to the naos, as well as the crosses which were incised, all point towards the altar which was situated in front of the closed-off door.

In Arab times, the church fell into disuse and served profane purposes. Gradually, the building became filled with rubble, so that nineteenth-century visitors could only enter it through two holes near the roof of the building. The transformation of the temple of Isis at Aswan into a church is an interesting, local parallel to the conversion of the temple dedicated to the same goddess at Philae. The example demonstrates what fate awaited smaller, less renowned temples, if turned into churches.

Near the temple of Isis, earlier excavations have revealed the south-east angle of the town wall of Ancient Syene, with a watchtower at the corner. Blocks from several temples on Elephantine have been reused in this ancient wall. Moreover, blocks from 'Temple X' were reused for a church built somewhat to the south-east of the temple of Isis. In this stretch of the wall, including the watchtower, some 200 blocks of a temple from the reign of the Emperor Tiberius were found, which would have stood once nearby. A Maltese cross was incised in the blocks of the tower dated, on unclear grounds, to the sixth century. However, the pottery found underneath the wall dates the reuse of the temple of Tiberius to the fifth or sixth century.⁴⁷⁵

Yet not all temples in Syene were entirely reused. Besides the temple of Isis, only one other temple was known to nineteenth-century travellers, the temple of Domitian.⁴⁷⁶ Although its hieroglyphic inscriptions were published in 1960, the temple has remained largely unexplored.⁴⁷⁷ The circumstance that most of the temple was still standing in the nineteenth century, however, suggests that it served other than building purposes. Future excavations by the Swiss Institute, which have only just begun, may reveal more of its reuse.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ Jaritz, 'Three Townsites', 41; Jaritz and Rodziewicz, 'Syene', 117, 120.

⁴⁷⁶ Champollion saw a temple of Nerva, but in fact this temple can be identified with that of Domitian. See H. Jaritz, 'Untersuchungen zum "Tempel des Domitian" in Assuan', *MDAIK* 31 (1975) 237-57, and 'Three Townsites', 41. Cf. *PMV* (1937) 223-4; Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 13-4.

⁴⁷⁷ R. Engelbach, 'Notes of Inspection, April 1921', *ASAE* 21 (1921) 188-96 at 195-6; C. de Wit, 'Les inscriptions du temple de Domitien à Assuan', *CdE* 35 (1960) 108-19.

⁴⁷⁸ In this respect, it may be noted that an emergency excavation in 2002 at another spot south of the German hospital unearthed a martyr's tomb and a *baptisterium* with a cross-shaped baptismal font, provisionally dated to the fifth or sixth century. In front of the *baptisterium*, Ancient Egyptian stelae were found reused as pavement slabs, the easternmost being set up with the inscriptions visible. As *baptisteria* are usually connected to the most important churches (Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 127-48, especially at 145, for examples of cross-shaped baptismal fonts), it could well have been that the episcopal church of Syene or another important church was nearby. Several architectural elements of such a large building have been recovered, as well as fragments of a temple of Ptolemy VIII (Grimal and Adly, 'Fouilles et travaux', 109-10). A final analysis of the remains, however, has to await the forthcoming publication.

Conclusion: The Reuse of Temples in the First Cataract Area

Our survey of the reuse of Ancient Egyptian temples throughout the First Cataract region in Late Antiquity has shown a more complex picture than that of a linear transformation of temple to church. None of the temples was completely destroyed and replaced by churches. In only three instances was a church built inside a temple: in the temples of Isis at Philae and Aswan, both dating to the sixth century, and in the temple of Arensnuphis at Philae, probably of a later date. Small churches were built in front of two temples, both of quadratic form: in the second half of the sixth century in front of the temple of Khnum at Elephantine, and in the seventh or eighth century in front of the temple of Augustus at Philae.

However, most often the temples were reused for building material. Several blocks from temples on Philae were reused in houses. The temple of Harendotes was completely razed to the ground and reused for the West Church on Philae. The same happened to 'Temple X', blocks of which were transported across the river to serve as building material for a church at Syene. The great temple of Khnum was gradually dismantled from the fifth century onwards, perhaps even earlier, and its forecourt reused for housing. 'Temple Y' was completely dismantled and reused in a sixth-century quay wall. Many more blocks from temples on Elephantine were reused in building projects at Syene, most often in the town wall. Near the temple of Isis, a large part of a temple from the reign of Tiberius was reused in a corner tower and a stretch of the wall in the fifth or sixth century.

Among these examples, the transformation of the temple of Isis at Philae stands out as a special case since its Ancient Egyptian cults continued for much longer than the rest of the preserved temples in the region. We know, for example, that the most important temple of Elephantine, the temple of Khnum had been abandoned by the fourth century. However, just as in the case of the temple of Isis, in the other cases where a date could be given for the reuse of the temples as churches this took place in the sixth century or later, which confirms the hypothesis that most Egyptian temples were only transformed into churches at a later stage. Until the sixth century, the First Cataract area must still have preserved most of its sacred landscape. Though abandoned, the temples were still largely visible.⁴⁷⁹

Gradually, however, the sacred landscape changed and became filled with churches. From the Appion petition it is known that both Philae and Syene possessed 'churches' in the second quarter of the fifth century. Nevertheless, the evidence for freestanding churches before the sixth century is rather modest. Although the West Church of Philae could date from the second half of the fifth century, the East Church probably dates to the sixth century or later. The reconstructed 'basilica' on Elephantine dates to the second half of the sixth century and the church on top of the quay wall probably as well. This does not mean that freestanding churches did not exist before the sixth century. They have probably not been preserved because they were made of perishable material such as mudbrick. Another possibility is that they were dismantled to be built up anew or renovated, a situation that can be assumed for predecessors of both the East and the West Church.⁴⁸⁰ By the sixth century, the landscape had definitively become Christian, and new purposes had to be found for the old, ruined buildings.

The examples have shown that not all temples were reused for religious purposes: more often, practical considerations were more important. At Philae, people had to make the most of the available space, illustrated for example by the building of houses in former temples or other occupations of former sacred space. At Syene and Elephantine, we see large-scale building projects, which were apparently centrally administered. On the other hand, the ideological impact of the few cases in which

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. B. Caseau, 'Sacred Landscapes', in Bowersock, Brown and Grabar, *Late Antiquity*, 21-59.

⁴⁸⁰ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 4-5.

temples were turned into churches cannot be ignored. The conversion of the temple of Isis at Philae would have had its effect. However, the development from temple to church was just one of the options.⁴⁸¹ Having reached the end of the sixth century, we will now turn to the Patermouthis archive, a papyrus archive which has much to say about the role the Church had come to play in sixth-century Syene.

⁴⁸¹ Cf. Brakke, 'From Temple to Cell', forthcoming, in which he shows that empty temples were sometimes reused by anchorites as dwellings.